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FROM THE COEUR D'ALENE PRESS

Unexpected tools help kids in school

Posted: Sunday, Nov 30, 2008 - 07:32:15 pm PST

By MAUREEN DOLAN

Staff writer

JEROME A. POLLOS/Press

Jordan Holmes, 8, works on matching cards during an exercise Wednesday with Kristine Dietz, a learning specialist at North Idaho Christian School in Hayden.

HAYDEN -- A small trampoline, some 2-by-4s and flash cards bearing black fish shapes are being used to help children become better spellers and readers at North Idaho Christian School.

Elijah, 9, said focusing has become easier for him.

"Before, the words sort of wiggled on the page a little bit," said Zach Schmitt, 7. "That's stopped."

The unconventional learning tools are used by Kristine Dietz, a former public school teacher with specialized training in individual development.

Dietz has been on staff at North Idaho Christian since classes started this fall, working with kids experiencing learning disabilities.

Results are starting to show.

"It's experimental, and we're monitoring it with the parents," said school Superintendent Larry Kay. "We're receiving very favorable feedback."

Terri Bailey's son couldn't earn better than a 46 percent on his second-grade spelling tests before he began working with Dietz.

"His spelling test last week was 100 percent," Bailey said. "He's more confident now and excited to work with spelling."

The family now has a small trampoline at home, and both of Bailey's sons use it to study their spelling.

Bailey, herself a fourth-grade teacher at the school, has seen other students' spelling skills improve after working with Dietz.

She and other teachers have been calling parents for the past two weeks to let them know their kids are showing improvement in the classroom after working with Dietz, who spends up to 20 minutes twice a week with students who are referred to her.

Learning disabilities -- like dyslexia and attention difficulties -- are often the result of some kind of trauma to the brain, Dietz said. It could be emotional or physical and could have happened as early as pre-birth.

The therapies Dietz uses allow her to assess which areas of a student's brain have been affected, making learning a challenge. They also provide the opportunity to re-train the brain and correct the skill gaps.

"I tell the kids, 'what do you do when the computer stops working properly? You reboot it.' We're basically rebooting their internal computers," she said.

Dietz retired from teaching about four years ago after working in the Post Falls and Coeur d'Alene school districts.

She was trained to use these learning therapies from Dr. Michael Giammatteo, whose work in the 1950s and 1960s is steeped in common theories of sensory integration involving motor, auditory and visual education.

While the therapies and theories aren't new, Dietz said, to her knowledge there are no schools -- private or public -- using them in the area.

"They've just been kind of pushed aside over the years," she said.

The trampoline exercise develops or re-trains the brain by adding large muscle activity to the learning process, Dietz said.

On the trampoline, a student faces a wall where a poster hangs with a series of arrows pointing in different directions. The student is expected to call out each arrow's direction, synchronizing the calls with the bounces on the trampoline.

The 2-by-4s lay on the floor end to end on the other side of the room. Dietz has students walk along them, toe-to-heel, forward and backward, to evaluate and work on balance.

"In a stressed situation, the first skill to drop off is directionality," Dietz said.

In another exercise, the student leans forward, pressing his or her forehead against a wall and with the forefinger on both right and left hands, simultaneously traces numbers on to the wall.

People with neurological deficits have a hard time forcing their brains to allow them to form the numbers correctly, Dietz explained.

The flash cards Dietz uses bear black fish shapes pointing in different directions. There are a dozen different patterns that students must match up with one another while Dietz watches and times them.

"I can really pick up a lot about their neurological development from these therapies," Dietz said.

The learning therapies are now provided as a regular service to eligible students at no extra charge at North Idaho Christian.

She is working with 17 students, more, she said, than she expected.

Dietz said there are private firms in the area offering services that are similar, but not the same, for "thousands of dollars."

She approached the school about working with students there because her grandchildren attend North Idaho Christian.

She considers it a way to give back.

"Learning isn't supposed to be a struggle," Dietz said.

FROM THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Idaho universities tightening belts

UI, Boise State to begin slicing budgets
Associated Press
November 27, 2008

BOISE – Officials at the University of Idaho and Boise State University are preparing to cut their budgets up to 5 percent in anticipation of reduced state spending.

The schools are expecting Gov. Butch Otter to announce the decrease, attributed to falling tax revenues, sometime after the Thanksgiving weekend.

Otter has already ordered a 1 percent budget holdback statewide, saving \$27 million.

He has also warned he will likely ask agencies to cut an additional 1.5 percent to save \$41 million.

Advertisement

University of Idaho President Steven B. Daley-Laursen recently put out a memo stating he expects cuts up to 5 percent.

"We are awaiting word, which may come from the governor this Tuesday, as to whether that expected percentage will increase," Daley-Laursen said in a memo posted on the university's Web site.

Several weeks ago, Boise State University officials told staff to propose budgets to reflect a 5 percent cut. That's a reduction of \$4.3 million.

Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, co-chairman of Legislature's budget committee, said the schools are acting prudently in planning for the worst.

"I know the governor is doing a good job in trying to minimize the holdbacks and look at ways we can balance our budget," Cameron said.

"Even though I have said agencies need to be prepared, I also don't want citizens to panic. Our state is in better shape than most."

Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, co-chairwoman of the budget panel, has said a 2.5 percent holdback probably wouldn't be large enough.

However, more than \$300 million has been set aside by Idaho lawmakers to offer some short-term stability.

"It does take several years to get through these challenges," said Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls. "We recognize the value of the money we set aside, but that we should not exhaust it quickly."

Money collected in the state's overall general fund was \$12.8 million below what was predicted for October. School officials said the current economic conditions could persist.

"We also believe that, given the turbulent economic conditions, holdbacks will continue and possibly increase in near-future years," Daley-Laursen said.

The school is imposing travel restrictions, he said, eliminating some face-to-face meetings when a phone call or video conference will work.

But he said traveling for meetings that could create new revenue sources will generally be allowed.

Books have schools in a bind

Evaluation of required reading limits classroom options in CdA

Students use the library at Lake City High School in Coeur d'Alene. The school district is looking into complaints about controversial books. The Spokesman-Review (Kathy Plonka The Spokesman-Review)

Alison Boggs
Staff writer
November 30, 2008

Margie Wise's son did not enjoy reading until his senior year at Coeur d'Alene High School, when he took a literature class that engrossed him in conversation about books like "Brave New World" and "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance."

"He would come home and say, 'I love my English class; we have the best discussions,' " Wise said. "He would say, 'It is the best way to end my day.' From a kid who's not academic and who is not a reader, that warms a mom's heart."

Another Coeur d'Alene mother, however, said her ninth-grade daughter was uncomfortable reading two books she was assigned in English class. The books contain profanity and sexually explicit situations inappropriate for a minor, said the girl's mother, Mary Jo Finney.

"I don't think that's necessary to teach minors," Finney said. "Their feeling is everything is acceptable, and it's not."

These two points of view encapsulate the struggles the Coeur d'Alene School District is experiencing as it attempts to evaluate all the books high school and middle school students read in literature classes. Complicating matters, due to an administrative error, the district finds itself in the unsavory position of having to conduct this evaluation during the school year, which has limited teachers' access to the books and inhibited their ability to do their jobs. Some teachers have complained that the district does not trust their professional judgment.

"Please, give us back our books!" high school English teacher Paul W. Swartz lamented in a Sept. 5 letter to the editor. "As a junior and senior English teacher I have only five novels to choose from besides my textbook! We have removed 78 books from our high schools and 39 from our middle schools. How does this removal of books promote the district's goal of literacy?"

The situation came to a head on Nov. 3, when the school board approved a group of those books but split 2-2 over whether the Aldous Huxley classic "Brave New World" would continue to be required reading in senior English classes. That tie vote will be broken in a special board meeting Dec. 15 when "Brave New World" and 26 other books approved by a citizens committee will be considered by the school board.

"Believe me, I've caught a little bit of flak over this," said board member Sid Fredrickson, who voted against "Brave New World" as required reading, believing it would continue to be an optional reading choice. Fredrickson said the majority of calls he has received favor retaining the classic. "There's definitely community concern about censorship. I didn't consider it censorship."

Board member Vern Newby, the other "no" vote, was steadfast in his feeling that the book should not be required reading. Newby said the book should remain only as an optional reading choice. He found the book to be "repetitious" in its descriptions of a "society gone amok with no

feelings." He said descriptions of promiscuous sex and naked bodies were prevalent throughout the book and that it wasn't "that well-written."

"It's a good book to read; I just think in our classroom setting we can do better," Newby said. "From my review of that piece of literature, we had better places we could go."

Board Chairwoman Edie Brooks, who voted in favor of the book, said the community response she's received has been almost entirely in favor of keeping the book on the list. "I read 'Brave New World' in high school and I'm 64 years old," Brooks said. "Around the country, there have been districts that have banned certain books. I personally don't believe in doing that."

Superintendents and curriculum directors at other major school districts in North Idaho and Spokane, including Spokane Public Schools, Central Valley, Lakeland and Post Falls school districts, say books have been challenged over the years, but not removed.

"In my tenure, never," said Post Falls Superintendent Jerry Keane, who has been with the district 18 years. "That doesn't mean there haven't been people who have said, 'What do you think of this book?' " he added. "I don't know why we haven't had more challenges, but we just haven't."

In most districts, including Coeur d'Alene, students can opt out of reading a specific book if they find it objectionable. Such students are given an alternate reading choice. Finney and other critics, however, said that process unnecessarily excludes a student from the classroom when other books might be selected that would be acceptable to all.

Community members have the right to issue a formal challenge to a book being used by all students in a classroom. Most districts surveyed then set up a committee of staff and parents to review the book and issue a recommendation, which is sent to administrators or the board of trustees for a final decision.

Wise said she finds it arrogant for a community member to attempt to deprive other people's children of the right to read and study a book in a classroom setting, under the guidance of a teacher trained to teach the literature.

"Now it's up to anyone to walk in off the street," she said. "We have an opt-out policy. Isn't that enough? Those of us that are in the majority want these books discussed."

Rosie Astorquia, a secondary education director, said the process likely will continue through January or February when the final books up for review are considered by the school board. She acknowledges the process has been difficult on teachers and asks for patience.

The process has "been a bit of a struggle in terms of time and giving our teachers options," Astorquia said. But, she added, "In no way have we tried to censor or ban things."

FROM THE MOSCOW PULLMAN DAILY NEWS (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

No new education news stories posted online today.

FROM THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Students jump-start higher education

High-schoolers who take dual credit courses are a step ahead of the game when they enroll in college

By Kerri Sandaine

Friday, November 28, 2008

ABOVE: Kelsey Marker works on her laptop during class. She is both a junior and a senior at Prairie High School at Cottonwood. She is among 40 students at PHS taking college courses for both high school and college credit. LEFT: Junior Wyatt Williams studies a college-level textbook. Williams wants to get some basic college courses completed before he enrolls in college. With those classes behind him, he'll be on the fast track toward completion of a bachelor's degree in engineering or biology.

Junior Wyatt Williams is getting basic college courses behind him so he pursue his engineering or biology degree faster.

Darbie Duclos teaches college algebra to students at Prairie High School, where a quarter of the students are earning college credits.

Lydia Deiss

COTTONWOOD - Kelsey Marker is in the 11th grade, but she's graduating in May. So, does that make her a junior or a senior?

"I'm both," said the 17-year-old. "I'm going to skip my senior year and go to (Lewis-Clark State College), and I'll have 12 college credits when I walk in."

Marker is one of 40 students at Prairie High School who are getting a jump start on their college careers by taking dual credit courses. Most students won't finish high school a year early, but many will get college-level experience and some general requirements checked off the list.

The option is becoming more popular because it cuts down on college expenses and the amount of time it takes to get a degree, said Lydia Deiss, school counselor. An added benefit is a boost in confidence.

"Some kids are afraid to go to college because they don't think they can cut it," Deiss said. "They are more likely to stay in college, and start in the first place, if they've already taken a college class. They're also saving a truckload of money. Our goal is to get the majority of core credits done during their junior and senior years."

More than 26 percent of the 152 kids who attend PHS are taking advantage of the dual credit program through LCSC, which is the highest percentage in the region. Credits cost \$65 each, compared to about \$204 at the college, and textbooks are provided.

Deiss said she hopes music, theater, applied math for vocational education and more sciences classes can be added next year. "I'm really excited about the program," she said.

Dual credits are also available through LCSC at schools in Lewiston, Orofino, Lapwai, Troy, Clarkston and Pomeroy. A similar program called Running Start is offered at Washington schools in the area through Walla Walla Community College. Some classes at Running Start require small fees for consumable supplies, but tuition is free.

High school teachers who participate in dual credit programs are typically paid extra for the increased workload.

Patti Hinkelman, who teaches college-level psychology and English at Prairie, said she enjoys the challenge. The students are working hard, and it's given her some new material to teach.

"There's a lot more pressure, but it's invigorating and it keeps me on my toes. It's given me a new lease on life, to tell you the truth."

Marker said Hinkelman's psychology class is what motivated her to pursue a career in school counseling. "I love that class."

And she opted for the fast track to graduation "mainly because I feel stuck in high school. I love it, but I want to move on. It takes six years of college to become a school counselor, so I want to get going on that."

Junior Wyatt Williams, 16, plans to pursue engineering or biology after he graduates from high school. He is currently taking English and history for college credits.

"It's saving me time and money, and I'm taking the classes from teachers I'm comfortable with," Williams said. "I'm doing the same work either way, so I might as well get college credit." Sandaine may be contacted at kerris@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2264.

School overhaul plan gets cautious look

Idaho officials are in no hurry to act on education group's 'radical' recommendations

Associated Press

Saturday, November 29, 2008

TWIN FALLS - Idaho officials are cautiously considering a national group's recommendations that are aimed at saving money on schools and producing students with more competitive skills.

A 2006 report called "Tough Choices or Tough Times" and written by a group of educators and corporate executives called the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce recommends giving high school students the option to leave school after their sophomore year for community college if they pass an exam.

Another proposal calls for schools to be operated by independent contractors, including companies owned by teachers.

Though officials in Utah, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have said they'll use some of the group's recommendations to help guide efforts to reform education in their states, officials in Idaho say they want to go slowly and watch developments elsewhere first. No action is expected this year, Mike Gwartney, director of the Idaho Department of Administration and a member of the Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence, told The Times-News.

"It's radical," Gwartney said of the report. "What we have said is this has long-term ramifications we could study. Our strategy really is to sort of sit a little bit on the sidelines."

The report includes some proposals that make sense, said Gwartney, a proponent of giving students a chance to attend a community college sooner. But other proposals, including the one to award contracts to groups to run schools, need scrutiny, he said.

The Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence, whose members include representatives from more than 70 companies such as Coeur d'Alene Mines, the Idaho Statesman and Micron Technology Inc., plans to meet in December to discuss Idaho's education strategy.

Ronn Robinson, director of state relations for the Washington, D.C.-based group that wrote the report, came to Idaho this year to discuss proposals with Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter and others. An overhaul of the education system cannot be done quickly, he said, adding that a state would need a pilot project to test the system for several years.

"There is no way a state could even remotely begin to consider implementing an agenda like this any time soon," Robinson said.

Some of the report's recommendations already have engendered opposition, including from school executives who could see their influence undermined.

"Our belief is that school boards are the people that should be in charge," said Wayne Davis, executive director of the Idaho Association of School Administrators. "There's not much support, at least from our organization."

Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna said he sees some potential in the plan's focus on recruiting teachers and expanding high school students' higher education opportunities. Luna said he wants to study whether desired outcomes would be diminished if only some of the recommendations became part of Idaho's education policies.

"My question has been - and what we are continuing to discuss - is if you don't take the whole approach, what results are you sacrificing?" Luna said. "There are some parts in there that definitely will require a lot more discussion and input."

Idaho charters struggle finding homes

Schools use churches, strip malls and just about anything else
Associated Press

Saturday, November 29, 2008

MERIDIAN, Idaho - The 20-foot cross was removed from the church steeple two years ago, not long after the Compass Public Charter School moved into the building.

The religious imagery inside is discreetly hidden while 420 students study math, reading and science. A large room with a vaulted ceiling and stained-glass windows serves as the band room, and a curtain covers a small cross above the pulpit.

This charter school in a former dairy town of 71,000 isn't the only one with a unique home.

In a state that has embraced alternatives to the traditional classroom, 31 public charter schools have found themselves setting up shop in everything from a former plant nursery and pet store in Coeur d'Alene, to a strip mall in Garden City and former athletic center in Boise.

Together, the schools serve roughly 11,000 students. But unlike traditional public schools, they cannot get money from property taxpayers to buy buildings through bonds or levies.

"That is the largest financial challenge charter schools face," said Shirley Rau, school choice coordinator for the state Department of Education. "They are borrowing at the same rate as other nonprofit facilities."

Idaho charters, approved by a 1998 state law, operate with state money based on average daily student attendance, just like traditional public schools. But to raise money for property, teachers, parents and community members seek out investors or borrow from banks to buy facilities.

A third of Idaho charter schools started out in portable trailer classrooms, typically in rural areas of the state where facilities are harder to find, Rau said. Many of these charters have since purchased or built facilities, but some still operate from mobile classrooms.

"What you'll see is a big farm field with trailers," Rau said, adding that a charter school set to open next year in northern Idaho is "probably going to end up in a furniture store."

All but two of the 15 charter schools that own facilities bought them with backing from investors, loans, heavy community fundraising and by saving chunks of state money they get based on student attendance.

"Most of this has happened in the last three years," Rau said. "They've only just been able to manage."

The Idaho Arts Charter School moved a new building this year after years of renting an old church and using nine trailers to hold nearly 600 students, grades K-12. The school is paying back a 30-year, \$7.5 million loan from Wachovia Corp. used to buy the facility, said Jackie Collins, Idaho Arts Charter School director.

"There wasn't any area banks that were willing to take the risk," Collins said.

The Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy leased a former plant nursery and pet store for three years before buying the warehouse-style building where 557 students in grades 6-12 wear uniforms and adhere to strict discipline codes as part of a rigorous college-prep program, said school business manager Glenn Mabile.

The school spent \$1.5 million to expand and renovate.

"We don't think you have to build a big glorious building to give students a quality education," Mabile said. "The programs and the people come first; a building is secondary."

The Compass school found an investor to buy the Meridian church it used to rent from Ten Mile Christian and now has to pay back a \$6 million loan. The church now pays the school rent and plans to move into a new facility next year.

In the meantime, the congregation makes sure to cover the communion table after each Sunday service.

"We have another church ready to move in. It will pay for our utilities," said Bridget Barrus, chairwoman of the board that governs Compass and one of the parents who founded it.

The 16 Idaho charter schools that do not own facilities either rent, lease or share while saving to buy a home.

Poll finds many state residents unaware of Idaho Land Board

Associated Press

Monday, December 1, 2008

BOISE - A state-funded poll of Idaho residents has found that 41 percent have never heard of the state Land Board and 91 percent don't know who's on it.

Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter is on the Land Board along with the secretary of state, attorney general, state controller and the state superintendent of schools.

They are responsible for managing about 2.46 million acres of endowment land that's remaining from the 3.6 million acres the state received from the federal government in 1890 when it became a state.

About 90 percent of the money generated from the endowment land goes to public schools, and state officials are obligated under state law to maximize profits over time from the land.

The poll was conducted in September.

FROM THE IDAHO-PRESS TRIBUNE, NAMPA

Students hold health fair

Sunday, November 30th, 2008 CALDWELL - Northwest Nazarene University nursing students recently held a health fair for students at Caldwell Adventist Elementary School.

Cherie Richards, professor of nursing at NNU, said this is the second year her students organized a health fair at the school. A total of 34 nursing students and two NNU instructors participated.

Organizers set up more than 15 booths in the school's gymnasium, including one by the Caldwell Fire Department. A Lions Foundation mobile screening unit was located outside.

NNU nursing student Keenan Galloway checks a Caldwell Adventist student's eyes during a health fair at the school Tuesday.

Mike Vogt / IPT

Nursing student Katherine Roth administered eye tests in the mobile unit

"It gives us good practice," she said. "It's good hands-on interaction with the kids."

Suzette Maxwell, an administrative assistant at the elementary school, said the kids enjoy the health fair.

"The kids were clapping," she said. "It's just a wonderful program over at NNU, and that they come and offer it to our school."

Maxwell added that sometimes parents don't have the money to take their students to the doctor and medical problems can be caught at the school event.

Screenings included checking the students' vital signs, height, weight, vision and hearing.

The fair included fire, water and animal safety lessons. Wholesome snacks and nutritional information were available.

Maxwell and Richards said organizers plan to hold the fair again next year.

"This is part of the nursing students' community wellness assessments," Richards said. "They get clinical credit for this."

Maxwell said 74 students in preschool through eighth grade participated in the health fair.

Jamie Miller, a fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, said the fair was an opportunity for the students to learn more about how to take care of themselves.

"Kids were able to learn about their bodies and health and the dangers of drugs," she said. "All of the nursing students were so nice. We're really grateful to the NNU Nursing Department."

Scholarship applications available online

Updated 11 hours 27 minutes ago High school seniors hoping for financial help with higher education can now begin applying for many scholarships online.

The State of Idaho, through the Office of the State Board of Education, provides an online application for the following:

Governor's Cup Scholarship, Academic

Governor's Cup Scholarship, Professional-Technical

Robert R. Lee Promise, "A" Academic

Robert R. Lee Promise, "A" Professional-Technical

Robert C. Byrd Scholarship

Tschudy Family Scholarship (Emmett High School graduates only)

The deadline for these scholarships is Jan. 15, 2009.

To apply or learn more about each scholarship, visit the board's Web site at www.boardofed.idaho.gov/scholarships.

FROM THE IDAHO STATESMAN

Board seeks approval to issue bonds for Caldwell campus

The urban renewal district is making the request in case financing plans for the Idaho TVCC location falls through.

NAMPA'S BOND PLANS

After months of waiting, Nampa officials got the OK last week to proceed with plans to issue up to \$18 million in bonds to start work on a new public safety building, the keystone in the city's downtown revitalization plans.

Five area residents had opposed the Nampa urban renewal district's request for judicial confirmation, but Judge Linda Copple Trout ruled in Nampa's favor Nov. 20.

The appeals period for that ruling does not expire until Dec. 31, so officials can't begin the bond process until early next year, Nampa economic development director Cliff Long said. In the meantime, he said, they are mulling their options.

Initially, officials planned to use some of the bond funds to buy downtown sites for the new public safety building and future library, but city leaders ended up using reserve funds on hand for those purchases rather than waiting for resolution to the court case.

Now, Long said, the bond funds probably would go toward demolition of the old Desert Inn Motel and preparing the block it sits on - surrounded by 1st and 2nd streets south and 8th and 9th avenues - for the public safety project, plus whatever portions of the construction could be covered by available bond funds.

Officials say building a \$27 million public safety building on the Desert Inn site would provide much-needed room for police and other services and free the city to sell the prime commercial block where the police station now sits. Private investment downtown is essential to raise the tax revenue needed to make the city's revitalization plans achievable, they say.

Kristin Rodine

IF YOU GO

The East Caldwell Urban Renewal Board will hold a public hearing at noon Tuesday in the community meeting room of the Caldwell Police Station, 110 S. 5th Ave., Caldwell.

BY KRISTIN RODINE - krodine@idahostatesman.com

Edition Date: 11/28/08

Caldwell's urban renewal district plans to seek a judge's approval to issue up to \$8.5 million in bonds to build a new Caldwell campus for Oregon's Treasure Valley Community College.

Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas said the proposal, set for a public hearing on Tuesday, is a fallback position so the community can move forward with the project even if the economic downturn prevents a private developer from getting financing as planned.

"This is so important to us; we're covering all of our bases," Nancolas said Wednesday, stressing the need to create more training and education options for the local workforce.

Plans still call for developer Butch Gilliland to build a new campus on land the renewal district owns in Sky Ranch and lease it to TVCC for six or seven years until the district has accrued enough capital to buy the 62,000-square-foot building, Nancolas said. But the renewal district wants approval to issue the bonds so it can finance construction this spring or summer if private financing doesn't come through in time, he said.

For Boise government watchdog Dave Frazier, the proposal raises the same red flag presented by a Nampa urban renewal plan to issue bonds toward a new public safety building without taking the issue to a public vote.

Last week, a judge confirmed the Nampa district's authority to do that, despite challenges from Frazier and four Canyon County taxpayers. Opponents say they are discussing options for appeal.

That ruling "pretty much cleared the air" for Caldwell's request, said ElJay Waite, city finance director and chairman of the East Caldwell Urban Renewal Board.

Glenn Koch, one of the Canyon taxpayers who challenged Nampa's plan, said Wednesday he is less inclined to oppose Caldwell's judicial confirmation proposal because it aims to provide space for education, not an expensive new city building.

But Frazier said the Caldwell plan merits the same opposition as Nampa's because the issue is not whether the project is worthy, it's how it will be funded. He and Caldwell watchdog Paul Alldredge say cities use urban renewal districts as alter egos to bypass a state constitutional requirement that cities and counties must get two-thirds majority approval from voters before entering long-term debt.

City leaders say that requirement doesn't apply to renewal districts because they are separate entities that have no taxing authority. Judge Linda Copple Trout last week confirmed that Nampa's renewal district has legal authority to issue bonds.

But Frazier stressed that urban renewal holdings become city property when the renewal district expires, contending that, "if the city is going to own it, it's a city project."

The bonds would be repaid by tax revenue from new development and increased property values within the renewal district's boundaries.

TVCC has offered classes in Caldwell for about six years in El Mercado along Nampa-Caldwell Boulevard, but officials say it has outgrown that 10,000 square foot space and needs room to expand its local offerings and enrollment.

Since the Ontario-based college cannot use Oregon state money to buy or build a campus in Idaho, Caldwell leaders announced plans in December to help the two-year school gain a bigger building to lease. The renewal district initially provided the 3-acre site and a \$102,000 grant, and Nancolas announced the private-public partnership with developer Gilliland in August.

Plans call for a two-story structure near Thomas Jefferson Charter School. The college would occupy a little more than half of the building initially, but it is expected to grow enough to take up all of the space within five years, said Steve Fultz, executive director of the Caldwell/Canyon Economic Development Council. Until then, he said, other post-secondary education purveyors are considering leasing space in the building.

Meanwhile, the College of Western Idaho is setting up shop about nine miles away in Nampa. CWI and TVCC leaders have said the demand for two-year college programs in Ada and Canyon counties is so great that there is more than enough room for both schools to prosper.

After next week's public hearing, the renewal board must wait two weeks before voting to petition the court for judicial confirmation, Waite said. Timing for the court hearing will depend on the assigned judge's schedule, he said, but officials hope bonds could be issued by May or June.

Classes in the new Caldwell Center probably would begin in winter or spring trimester 2010, Fultz said.

The construction cost is estimated at \$7.5 million, Waite said. The additional \$1 million in bonds would cover an estimated \$200,000 in bonding costs plus provide the legally required reserve fund, he said.

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Screenings open to special-needs children

- STATESMAN STAFF
Edition Date: 11/29/08

Services and screenings are available for children with special needs through the Boise School District Early Childhood Special Education Program.

If you have a child who is from 3 to 5 years old and may have possible problems in the areas of self-help skills, speech, language, emotional, concepts, hearing, vision or motor skills, call 854-4141 to set up an appointment for a screening.

Screening dates are Monday and Jan. 12, Feb. 9 and March 9.

FROM THE TWIN FALLS TIMES-NEWS

Cassia School Board hears presentations from high schools

By Damon Hunzeker

Times-News writer

It was like something out of 1950s television - teenagers talking about the virtue of respect and the value of their teachers.

At Tuesday night's board meeting, members of the student councils from Burley and Oakley high schools delivered presentations to the Cassia County School Board, as well as 13 audience members. Other schools presented during last month's meeting.

Luis Novoa, the BHS student body vice president, praised the school's faculty and administration - especially Principal Jodie Mills, who was in the audience.

"Burley High School is like this huge galaxy full of stars - some bright, some not as bright and dull," he said.

But, Novoa emphasized, no matter how dull the star, the administration and faculty attentively guide each student toward his or her full potential.

Of the many positive developments at BHS in the past year, Novoa mentioned the accomplishment of the school passing the Annual Yearly Progress goals required by the Department of Education under No Child Left Behind, the new athletic stadium, the community block party, Cabin Fever Day, Mr. BHS, homecoming, the Christmas food drive, and the recent production of "West Side Story."

Regarding the food drive, Novoa said, "We don't want to isolate ourselves as a school - we want the whole community involved."

The production of "West Side Story" reflected the ethnic diversity at BHS, he said, adding, "We have our little cliques at Burley High School - but really, it's only at lunch."

Brian Babbitt and Caleb Greenwell, the respective Oakley High School student body president and vice president, mentioned the rigorous enforcement of rules at the school.

"A couple of kids need to learn respect," Greenwell said.

They focused, however, on school organizations.

"We do a lot of sports. There's not much else to do ...#045; but that's a touchy subject," Greenwell said, referring to the school's recent loss at state. Some of the Oakley High pursuits are unique, as least in name - such as SASS, an acronym that stands, somewhat redundantly, for "Secret Acts of Secret Service."

Babbitt singled out "Respect Groups" and the "Peanut Butter Drive," a project that raises food for the needy.

"We just see how much peanut butter we can stack up on the wall," Babbitt said.

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MV charter schools get federal grants

By Ben Botkin
Times-News writer

Federal dollars will help four Magic Valley charter schools to the tune of at least \$200,000 each.

The four charter schools are receiving a total of \$865,860 in federal aid through the U.S. Department of Education's Charter School Program grants. The grants, announced on Tuesday, are part of a \$3.4 million package going to 11 charter schools in Idaho.

The grants are aimed at helping the public charter schools with costs during their infancy in areas like curriculum, professional development, operation costs and textbooks.

The Southern Idaho Learning Center in Twin Falls is receiving a \$200,000 grant that will help the center's efforts to open a charter school in the community in the fall of 2009.

"It's huge," said Melody Lenkner, director of the center. "There's no way we could do this without the grant."

The center's charter school, when it opens, will be a middle school for students with learning disabilities. The school will open next year with up to 60 sixth-grade students and add seventh and eighth grades in subsequent years.

The grant will help with costs that include furnishings, curriculum, teacher training and consultants. The school is not yet accepting student applications.

Advanced Regional Technical Education Coalition (ARTEC) Charter School, which works with school districts to provide technical programs throughout the Magic Valley, is getting \$200,000.

The money will help with equipment costs for the programs, summer workshops for teachers and training for board members, said Claire Major, the assistant director.

The school teaches courses that include electronics, diesel machinery, auto mechanics and construction.

"The programs are very expensive to operate," Major said.

North Valley Academy in Gooding is getting \$232,860, coming at a time when the school will expand next fall and add high school grades. Two-thirds of the grant will go toward helping with the high school costs, said Gayle DeSmet, the head administrator of the school.

The grant will cover costs of teacher training, computers and textbooks, she said.

Xavier Charter School in Twin Falls is receiving \$233,000. That money will help with costs like teacher training, desks and computer equipment.

"It's very helpful," said Renee Robbins, chair of the school's board.

Idaho has 31 charter schools with 11,000 students statewide.

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Cassia School District changes graduation requirements

By Damon Hunzeker
Times-News writer

The Idaho State Board of Education has imposed some curriculum changes upon local schools that may affect the Cassia County School District differently than others.

The change, which applies to the 2013 graduation class of incoming freshman next fall, comprises two additional math credits and two additional science credits.

"In many cases our high school requirements have been above what the state requires," Cassia Superintendent Gaylen Smyer said.

"I would guess that we have 80 percent of our students who are already meeting the requirements."

To accommodate the change, the district will be eliminating some required credits in social studies and electives.

Currently, Cassia students take two U.S. history classes - divided by the Civil War era - and a world-history class. One of those will be eliminated. The board hasn't decided which one.

Regardless, teachers who instruct any of the eliminated courses will be looking for other work to fill their days. That could result in the teachers obtaining credentials in math and science courses or the district hiring new teachers who already have the necessary credentials.

"We may have to get creative on credentials," Jodie Mills, the Burley High School principal, said at Tuesday night's board meeting.

Cassia School Board Chairwoman Debbie Critchfield echoed the sentiment.

"It sounds like the decision's been made way above our heads as far as what we'll be doing - we just need to get creative," she said.

Smyer attributed the change to "the perception that U.S. students are falling behind developing countries in math and science abilities."

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Cassia schools adopt new policies

By Damon Hunzeker

Times-News writer

In an effort to comply with state and federal laws, the Cassia County School District recently approved several new policies.

On Tuesday, the board adopted Policy 1006, which prohibits registered sex offenders from entering school premises or participating in school activities.

It allows a few exceptions, such as delivery personnel on school grounds briefly or anyone with "a legitimate need."

Policy 565, also adopted Tuesday, updates student immunizations required by the state.

Anyone, however, can refuse immunizations by providing "a statement of objection on religious or other grounds."

Policy 407, which updates the district's compliance with changes to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), was given its first reading Tuesday.

The FMLA was enacted by Congress in 1993 and mandates that employers allow 12 weeks of job-protected leave for eligible employees with medical emergencies, including the needs of immediate family members.

In January, President Bush signed into law an amendment to the FMLA - 12 weeks of leave because of "any qualifying exigency" for anyone who is in the military or who has an immediate family member on active duty.

Additionally, an eligible employee may take 26 weeks of leave during a 12-month period to care for a family member injured in the line of duty.

"It makes us current with federal law, as far as military service is covered. It's part of the yearly review we go through to make sure we're compliant," Debbie Critchfield, chairwoman of the school board, said.

The second reading of Policy 407 will occur in the Dec. 16 meeting - and, unless significant changes are needed, will be adopted at that time.

Adding up new requirements

High schools prepare for new math, science standards

By Ben Botkin

Times-News writer

Magic Valley high school educators are already making plans for the class of 2013.

New state-mandated high school graduation requirements will kick in next year when freshmen begin school in the fall.

Before those students can graduate in 2013, they must take an additional combined four credits of math and science. That means six credits of math, an increase of two from the existing four-credit requirement, and six credits of science, also an increase from four credits. Two credits can be taken in a school year, so the increases are the equivalent of one extra year each of math and science classes.

The additional science classes must have lab work for students, too. Students also will need to complete a senior project.

The changes were made to assure all students are involved in meaningful academic classes and better prepared for the work force and education beyond high school, said Nick Smith, deputy superintendent of school support services for the Idaho State Department of Education.

"For a lot of districts, this is not something new for them," he said of the requirements, which the Legislature approved in 2007.

Schools will adapt differently to the requirements. Some high schools, for example, already require six credits each of math and science because they exceed the current state-mandated requirements.

Mary Lu Barry, director of secondary programs at Twin Falls School District, said the district's current graduation requirements are six credits of math and six of science - the same as the new state requirements. One change for the district will be the new state requirement that two math credits be taken during the student's senior year.

The district is looking at the possibility of a class for incoming freshmen that would focus on career exploration and research skills. Part of that class would be devoted to students starting to think of ideas for the project needed to graduate, Barry said.

"It's going to prepare them better for high school and work and college," she said, adding that the district is also looking into a possible technical math course.

In 2010, the department of education plans to ask the Legislature to fund more math and science teachers. The department is also gathering information from school districts with senior project programs already in place that can provide schools with ideas and guidance.

"We don't need to recreate the wheel," Smith said.

Burley High School currently requires two years each of math and science, though the majority of students already take three years of those courses, said Principal Jodie Mills.

Dan Rogers, principal of Minico High School, said many students already opt for a diploma with honors, which includes enough math and science to meet the new requirements. The new changes will simply mean that the school does away with its standard diploma program, he said.

Clark Muscat, principal of Jerome High School, said the new requirements will create a need for more science labs. Jerome currently requires four science credits.

The high school wants to have plenty of options for the third year of science that include anatomy and environmental science courses that could help students explore career possibilities, Muscat said.

As for the math requirements, Jerome High School already has six credits in place, though students currently don't need to take mathematics their senior year. Muscat, while supportive of a six-credit requirement, doesn't see any sense in mandating math courses for the senior year.

With six credits, that's three years of math, which means that students will end up skipping a year of mathematics earlier in their high school career, he said.

"We're struggling with that, with what are we going to do and are we offering enough choice?" Muscat said, adding that the local schools can ensure that students have a productive senior year. "I don't see the soundness of saying it's OK to take a year off just to get two credits in your senior year."

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FROM THE IDAHO STATE JOURNAL (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Middle school science students do the robot

BY JOHN BULGER

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POCATELLO — As the scientists huddled around their robotic creation, they analyzed its readiness and determined which mission to perform. Decision made, they programmed their machine, which advanced toward the beleaguered townspeople and swept them up, guiding them to safety.

Then it took a wrong turn and smashed them into a wall.

Such are the travails of the Lego people and animals who populate Irving Middle School's testing facility for their robotic creations. The four student teams will compete Dec. 5-6 at Idaho State University's Student Union Building in the regional tournament of the First Lego League's 2008 Climate Connections.

Irving will send four teams to the competition, in which students must devise robots that can accomplish as many missions as possible in twoand-one-half minutes.

The girls from Team BDNC showed off their streamlined robot's skills as it successfully moved objects from one sector to another and returned to base. With another week to prepare, they are still working out the fine details — such as not crushing the innocent Lego townsfolk.

But the robot nearly pushed a levy into place. On the other side of the table, a boys team's hulking robot lifted an imperiled polar bear in its mechanized maw and roughly but safely deposited it ... well, wherever a polar bear needs to be safely deposited.

This year's climate theme is part of the competition's annual task to create a challenge that relates to significant realworld issues. Team BDNC has taken on air inversion, an issue that has local ramifications.

On the first day of the competition, the girls will make a 5-minute presentation to the judges as to their project. The girls have chosen to do their exhibition in the form of a skit.

The team will also explain their project's design. The girls have opted for a "less is more" design for their robot.

"Some robots are complex," explained team member Tiffani Betty, 12. "We tried it with a simple design and it worked just as well."

Guided by science teachers Diane Stinger and Elissa Novy, the girls estimate they have toiled approximately 50 hours on their project, with more to come next week before the competition. Stinger said the projects allow the students to explore and apply their science and math skills in a fun and practical way.

"This particular group of kids is gifted and talented," Stinger said. "They just love it."

The all-girl team of Betty, Jayde Cooper, 13, Lily Genta, 12, Anna Kaiser, 12, and Micah Kenney, 13, hopes its robot prevails at the regional competition so the team may advance to the state competition in Moscow in the spring.

"There were 49 teams last year," said Betty of the regional competition.

Team BDNC, a pseudoacronym for “Bacon Doesn’t Necessarily Cook,” appeared unimpressed by the boys’ monster robot with its Lego steam shovel attachment. But they are mindful of the importance of doing well, as they grudgingly revealed the real meaning of their team’s acronym. “Boys Dig Nerdy Chicks,” said Kenney conspiratorially.

Idaho charters Face hurdles Finding homes

The 20-foot cross was removed from the church steeple two years ago, not long after the Compass Public Charter School moved into the building.

The religious imagery inside is discreetly hidden while 420 students study math, reading and science. A large room with a vaulted ceiling and stain glass windows serves as the band room, and a curtain covers a small cross above the pulpit.

This charter school in a former dairy town of 71,000 isn’t the only one with a unique home.

In a state that has embraced alternatives to the traditional classroom, 31 public charter schools have found themselves setting up shop in everything from a former plant nursery and pet store in Coeur d’Alene, to a strip mall in Garden City and former athletic center in Boise.

Officials Cautious On Education Group Report

Idaho officials are cautiously considering a national group’s recommendations that are aimed at saving money on schools and producing students with more competitive skills.

A 2006 report called “Tough Choices or Tough Times” and written by a group of educators and corporate executives called the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce recommends giving high school students the option to leave school after their sophomore year for community college if they pass an exam.

Another proposal calls for schools to be operated by independent contractors, including companies owned by teachers.

Though officials in Utah, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have said they’ll use some of the group’s recommendations to help guide efforts to reform education in their states, officials in Idaho say they want to go slowly and watch developments elsewhere first. No action is expected this year, Mike Gwartney, director of the Idaho Department of Administration and a member of the Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence, told The Times-News.

“It’s radical,” Gwartney said of the report. “What we have said is this has long-term ramifications we could study. Our strategy really is to sort of sit a little bit on the sidelines.”

The report includes some proposals that make sense, said Gwartney, a proponent of giving students a chance to attend a community college sooner. But other proposals, including the one to award contracts to groups to run schools, need significant scrutiny, he said.

The Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence, whose members include representatives from more than 70 companies such as Coeur d’Alene Mines, the Idaho Statesman and Micron Technology Inc., plans to meet in December to discuss Idaho’s education strategy.

Ronn Robinson, director of state relations for the Washington, D.C.-based group that wrote the report, came to Idaho this year to discuss proposals with Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter and others. An

overhaul of the education system cannot be done quickly, he said, adding a state would need a pilot project to test the system for several years.

“There is no way a state could even remotely begin to consider implementing an agenda like this any time soon,” Robinson said.

Some of the report’s recommendations already have engendered opposition, including from school executives who could see their influence undermined.

“Our belief is that school boards are the people that should be in charge,” said Wayne Davis, executive director of the Idaho Association of School Administrators. “There’s not much support, at least from our organization.”

Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna said he sees some potential in the plan’s focus on recruiting teachers and expanding high school students’ higher education opportunities. Luna said he wants to study whether desired outcomes would be diminished if only some of the recommendations became part of Idaho’s education policies.

“My question has been — and what we are continuing to discuss — is if you don’t take the whole approach, what results are you sacrificing?” Luna said. “There are some parts in there that definitely will require a lot more discussion and input.”

FROM THE IDAHO FALLS POST REGISTER (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Universities tighten their belts

Idaho's universities are poised to trim spending by as much as 5 percent.
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOISE -- Officials at the University of Idaho and Boise State University are preparing to cut their budgets up to 5 percent in anticipation of reduced state spending due to dropping tax revenues.

The schools are expecting Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter to announce the decrease sometime after the Thanksgiving weekend.

Otter has already ordered a 1 percent budget holdback statewide, saving \$27 million.

He has also warned he will likely ask agencies to cut an additional 1.5 percent to save \$41 million.

University of Idaho President Steven B. Daley-Laursen recently put out a memo stating he expects cuts up to 5 percent.

"We are awaiting word, which may come from the governor this Tuesday, as to whether that expected percentage will increase," Daley-Laursen said in a memo posted on the school's Web site. "We believe it may possibly be as much as 5 percent."

Several weeks ago, Boise State University officials told staff to propose budgets to reflect a 5 percent cut. That's a reduction of \$4.3 million.

Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, co-chairman of the Legislature's budget committee, said the schools are acting prudently in planning for the worst.

"I know the governor is doing a good job in trying to minimize the holdbacks and look at ways we can balance our budget," Cameron said. "Even though I have said agencies need to be prepared, I also don't want citizens to panic. Our state is in better shape than most."

Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, co-chairwoman of the budget panel, has said a 2.5 percent holdback probably wouldn't be a large enough cut.

However, more than \$300 million has been set aside by Idaho lawmakers to offer some short-term stability.

"It does take several years to get through these challenges," said Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls. "We recognize the value of the money we set aside, but that we should not exhaust it quickly."

Money collected in the state's overall general fund was \$12.8 million below what was predicted for October. School officials said the current economic conditions could persist for some time.

"We also believe that, given the turbulent economic conditions, holdbacks will continue and possibly increase in near-future years," Daley-Laursen said.

The school is imposing travel restrictions, he said, eliminating some face-to-face meetings when a phone call or video conference will work.

But he said traveling for meetings that could create new revenue sources will generally be allowed.

Merits of pay

By SAMANTHA PAK spak@postregister.com

Local teachers and administrators asked an arbitrator to help resolve differences over the idea of merit-based pay.

Local teachers and administrators from Bonneville Joint School District 93 told their stories to an arbitrator in a closed meeting for more than five hours Tuesday. The dispute concerned merit pay for teachers, something that will be debated during the upcoming legislative session.

The issue took center stage in May when Bonneville Superintendent Chuck Shackett decided not to wait for lawmakers and came up with his own pay-for-performance plan.

Shackett used money from a federal grant to reward teachers who were deemed deserving.

The Bonneville Education Association, the local teachers union, objected, saying the money should have been dispersed equally to all teachers in the district.

Hence, Tuesday's meeting.

Both sides argued their case. A decision isn't expected for 60 to 90 days.

Neither side would say much about what happened during the hearing, but Shackett said he anticipates the decision will take closer to 90 days than 60.

The amount in question is \$50,500 from a federal Title II grant. According to the U.S. Department of Education Web site, the purpose of the grant is to increase academic achievement in schools by improving teacher and principal quality.

Among other things, the money can be used for training, increasing the number of teachers, recruiting and retaining quality teachers.

District 93 used the grant money for 41 Teacher of the Year awards ranging from \$500 to \$4,000. In a previous Post Register article, Shackett said that "the awards are the district's attempt to start performance-based pay, an idea that was kicked around but ultimately failed to pass the Idaho Legislature."

Shackett is referring to a merit pay bill that was introduced by Idaho's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Luna. The bill died in the Legislature because lawmakers decided it was too expensive, but Melissa McGrath, spokeswoman for the Idaho Department of Education, said Luna plans to introduce another merit pay bill when the Legislature convenes in January.

Details of the bill are not yet known, but she said Luna is meeting once a week with the state's teachers union, Idaho School Boards Association and Idaho School Administrators Association to work out details. Luna is also meeting periodically with legislators. McGrath said Luna is committed to the notion that money allocated for teacher pay raises will be based on a formula in which one-third of the money will go into base pay and the other two-thirds will go toward pay for performance.

Idaho charters face hurdles finding homes

By JESSIE L. BONNER Associated Press

MERIDIAN -- The 20-foot cross was removed from the church steeple two years ago, not long after the Compass Public Charter School moved into the building.

The religious imagery inside is discreetly hidden while 420 students study math, reading and science. A large room with a vaulted ceiling and stain glass windows serves as the band room, and a curtain covers a small cross above the pulpit.

This charter school in a former dairy town of 71,000 isn't the only one with a unique home.

In a state that has embraced alternatives to the traditional classroom, 31 public charter schools have found themselves setting up shop in everything from a former plant nursery and pet store in Coeur d'Alene, to a strip mall in Garden City and athletic center in Boise.

Together, the schools serve some 11,000 students. But unlike traditional public schools, they cannot get money from property taxpayers to buy buildings through bonds or levies.

"That is the largest financial challenge charter schools face," said Shirley Rau, school choice coordinator for the state Department of Education. "They are borrowing at the same rate as other nonprofit facilities."

Idaho charters, approved by a 1998 state law, operate with state money based on average daily student attendance, just like traditional public schools. But to raise money for property, teachers, parents and community members seek out investors or borrow from banks to buy facilities.

A third of Idaho charter schools started out in portable trailer classrooms, typically in rural areas of the state where facilities are harder to find, Rau said. Many of these charters have since purchased or built facilities, but some still operate from mobile classrooms.

"What you'll see is a big farm field with trailers," Rau said, adding that a charter school set to open in northern Idaho is "probably going to end up in a furniture store."

All but two of the 15 charter schools that own facilities did so with backing from investors, loans, heavy community fundraising and by saving chunks of state money they get based on student attendance.